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11. Lead Stories Summary

ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute led with a story on the sentence of a Swiss gigolo for blackmailing BMW heiress Susanne Klatten. ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with a story on the deteriorating economic crisis. Newspapers led with tabloid and economic stories. Editorials focused on the economic crisis, the trial against a blackmailer, stem cell research, and Afghanistan.

12. North Korea

Frankfurter Allgemeine commented: "North Korean protests against U.S.-South Korean military maneuvers have been a matter of routine in recent years in Northeast Asia. But this year, everything is more aggressive.... North Korea's plans to launch a space satellite could lead to a crisis.... In recent months, North Korea maneuvered itself into a difficult situation. The attempt to get the attention of the new U.S. administration had led to increasingly verbal abuses.... Let's hope Pyongyang is reasonable enough not to launch the rocket in the direction of Japan or the United States.... Kim Jong-il's regime, which is weakened by speculation over its leader's succession, believes it must hide its obvious weakness by verbal attacks."

Frankfurter Rundschau editorialized: "North Korea's dictator is doing once again what he can do best: provoke.... Although Kim has some reason to be annoyed; 56,000 U.S. and South Korean soldiers began a maneuver to prepare for a potential war with North Korea. But the training happens regularly and only led to diplomatic protests in the past. This time around, Kim Jong-il seems to desire deteriorating relations. For months, he has not missed any opportunity to attack the south. This could be muscle-flexing of a

weakened leader. After the leader disappeared last year for months, he might now want to prove his power. Given that his country is collapsing, this may be necessary."

13. Western Strategy on Afghanistan, Elections

Following President Obama's statement that the West could also include moderate Taliban in talks about peace, Sueddeutsche is speculating under the headline "Wanted: Good Taliban!" who these moderate Taliban might be. "People with half-long beards? Advocates of a Sharia-light?" The daily added that such a group is hard to find. They have no platform, they have no official spokesmen, and there is no political arm of the Taliban with which the West could enter into talks. The paper concluded: "If the Taliban get a share in power, then the West must bid farewell to the noble project of democracy."

Handelsblatt judged: "In the future, other countries such as Iran, Pakistan, and Russia are to be integrated into the Afghanistan strategy. This sounds absurd, but in reality there is no alternative to this change of course, for the helplessness of Europeans and Americans has grown over the past few months. Seven years after the ouster of the Taliban, they have not succeeded in putting the country on its own feet. That is why it is overdue to correct two mistakes of the previous strategy: Pakistan and Iran's integration is necessary. In addition, Barack Obama wants to talk with 'moderate Taliban.' He is now following the UN recommendation which said that a black-and-white picture of the country would not help. But for the Europeans, Obama's change of course is a challenge. Thus far they have been able to argue that their failures in Afghanistan were based on a failed U.S. policy towards the country. In the future, however, there will be no more excuses for this failure."

In the view of die tageszeitung, "there may be a chance for halfway peaceful elections in August if President Obama succeeded in integrating local, non-ideological leaders in the political reconstruction process. That hope is based on the view that the leadership around Mullah Omar could slowly but gradually be isolated from the basis of the tribes from where it recruits new fighters. But possible talks should insist on minimum standards, for instance that the Taliban refrain from terror attacks and respect the Afghan Constitution. In return, the United States could rethink the number of additional soldiers it wants to send to the country. At the same time, Obama should correct the policy of the U.S. military. But the fact that the Taliban are regaining influence is also based on the previous incapability of the Karzai government and donor countries to improve the situation of the rural population. More jobs would create greater security."

Regional daily Maerkische Allgemeine of Potsdam opined; "No one wants to talk with the fanatic heads of the Taliban such as Mullah Omar. It would also be impossible to integrate them. The moderate Taliban with whom one could enter into talks would at best lead to the formation of a splinter group. But this would not resolve the problem of terror attacks."

Regional daily Maerkische Oderzeitung of Frankfurt on the Oder argued: "President Karzai is referring to the Constitution which stipulates that elections must be held 30 to 60 days before the end of the president's regular term. This will end at the end of May. If elections are postponed, Afghanistan would be without a president. This would not be so important because Karzai is disdainfully called the 'mayor of Kabul' anyway. But the painfully-built facade of democratic structures in the Hindu Kush would then break apart. A postponement of the elections, which the West wants, would also be a confession of their failure."

14. Northern Ireland Attacks

This morning's ZDF-TV's Heute newscast led with a story on the killing of a police officer saying: "Another violent act is shaking Northern Ireland." Newspapers headlines: "British and Irish implore peace" (Sueddeutsche Zeitung), "Northern Ireland sticks to reconciliation" (Berliner Zeitung), "Anxious times in Belfast" (Frankfurter Rundschau).

Sueddeutsche Zeitung commented that "most people in Northern Ireland

no longer want to hear from the radical fighters," adding: "The fact that all sides condemned the terror attack on the barracks is a sign of normality in Northern Ireland.... What Martin McGuinness said did not just reveal the dismay about the bloodshed, but made also clear that it plunged Sinn Fein into a difficult situation. For Sinn Fein, nothing less than its credibility as the leading republican movement is at stake..... The overwhelming majority of the people in Northern Ireland are not at all interested in returning to the not-at-all romantic times of murder, killings, hatred and repression. However, a small minority - including those on the extreme Protestant wing - see the peace treaty as treason. Although these extremists are not so well organized and armed like their predecessors in the years of the civil war, they have the potential to destabilize the situation.... Let's hope that the recent bloodshed moves Republicans and Unionists to overcome its remaining differences. The two soldiers should not have died in vain."

15. Human Rights

Under the headline "Obama's Realpolitik," FT Deutschland commented on the U.S. government's approach to human rights and Tibet: "Last summer was the moment of Tibetans.... Now, as the violent crackdown of the Tibetan uprising sees its 50th anniversary, the focus has shifted. The crisis of the global economy dominates all other topics. China is needed as a consumer, purchaser of government bonds and as a rescuer in an emergency. In this respect, human rights seem to be for many governments something from a different planet. In addition, the new U.S. government clearly differs in this question from its predecessor. Secretary Clinton does not spend a lot of time on domestic shortcomings. For a meeting with her Russian counterpart, Clinton even brought a silly reset button. The message was: forget the unpleasant things we have said about you before and let's talk about things we can both do with each other. This new realpolitik contradicts the expectations that President Obama wants to present America with a more human face. Although Obama has decided to close Guantanamo, he has also sent the message that he does not care what others do at home."

16. Financial Crisis

Die Welt opined on its front page: "The World Bank scenario could hardly be gloomier. This is an economic crisis that will stick to the collective memory of the whole world. At the end of this year, mankind will be poorer than it was at the beginning. If it is not economic reason, it should at least be empathy for the weakest that should prevent politicians from setting up new trade obstacles. All those critics are wrong who consider this crisis the final evidence that capitalism and globalization are devilish stuff. The recession has had such a great impact on the emerging countries because globalization made possible economic integration and the creation of wealth. In return, the industrialized countries will hardly grow again if demand from the developing world does not resume. As far as the economy is concerned, all people sit in the same boat. This is the decisive lesson from this crisis. That is why the fight against protectionism must be on top of the agenda of the G-20 in London."

In the view of Handelsblatt, "the World Bank and the Asian's Development Bank's reports have made clear that it is wrong to think that the threshold countries would be able to decouple from the industrialized countries. But it is already clear that it is too much for the financial institutions to help, while the industrialized countries have to deal with their own problems. That is why the developing and threshold nations cannot expect too much.

That is also why it is all the more important that the G-20 agree not only on the future oversight of the financial markets, but also to improve the coordination of their global economic policies. In this global crisis, state, institutional, and private efforts must be coordinated much better than in the past. Only if all sides involved succeed in linking a mixture of stimuli for consumption, tax relief, and clearly targeted investments can the global economy return to the path of growth in 2010. This is the task for the G-20."

According to Tagesspiegel, "this crisis is no longer a virtual crisis but a matter of life or death. People will die because banks played a poker game. Europe should remember that Africa is only a

few kilometers away. The appeal of the World Bank to the G-20 to keep the developing nations in mind at the G-20 summit should not die away. Those who try to save only themselves in a globalized world will save nothing."

Berliner Zeitung judged: "The World Bank must now help. First, it will issue more bonds for private investors. This is a promising approach because such bonds are popular among investors, and because strong donors are behind such bonds. With them, companies in developing countries could escape via the World Bank a looming credit crunch as long as they are able to pay interest. But the poorest of the poor are unable to do this. That is why the World Bank continues to be dependent on classical development assistance and, donor countries should not be relieved from their responsibilities during times of crises either."

According to die tageszeitung, "the World Bank's warning against an economic disaster for the developing nations is not mere panic-mongering to regain lost power. The IMF and the World Bank can do very well without this. It has been a long time since their support was so appreciated. But these two institutions have not passed the test as crisis managers. Their neo-liberal concepts worsened the Asian crisis as well as in Latin America and Africa, where they led to lasting stagnation. But what alternative exists for developing and threshold countries in misery? Almost none. That is why it is now all the more important not to repeat the old mistakes. The G-20 should now say: the IMF and the World Bank will get more money only if they adhere to strict conditions. This includes giving up a policy of deregulation and privatization, for those recipes not only led the developing countries but also the entire global economy to the brink of abyss."

In an editorial, Sueddeutsche Zeitung dealt with possible new tensions between the U.S. and the EU in the fight against the financial crisis. "Keynes There, Sonnemann There" is the headline in the paper. It adds: "Seen from Washington or New York, the world looks totally different than seen from Paris or Berlin. The differences between the U.S. and Europe are politically delicate. While at the G-20 the United States wants to pursue a global economic policy, the Europeans are striving for perfect financial oversight to prevent a repetition of the crisis. Basically the solution simple: both sides are right, at least partially. But there is still a third aspect which has not really been addressed: if all sides involved do not succeed in stabilizing the banks, then even the best economic bailout programs will not make sense. One reason for the crash at the stock markets since President Obama has taken office is that important details of his banking package are still missing. It is probably useful in the preparatory stages of the G-20 that all participants are aware of the fact that a failure would be a disaster for the world. Everything will now depend on whether those in London agree on three elements: first, the rescue of the banks, second, the extension of economic bailout programs, and third, an agreement on the guidelines for financial oversight."

17. Stem Cell Research

ARD-TV's primetime Tagesschau commented: "What Barack Obama announced today is another paradigm shift - a radical renunciation of the political and religious dogma of the Bush times. Recognizing climate change, negotiating with moderate Taliban, maybe lifting abortion bans soon -- the pace of the new alignment is breathtaking."

Berliner Zeitung editorialized: "With his decision to lift the restrictions on stem cell research, President Obama sent an important signal. George Bush's campaign against science has come to an end. After eight years of a clash of cultures, reason is returning the White House. The times are over when politicians believed they could ignore scientific facts and determine results beforehand.... Obama now is making resources available urgently necessary to find out in scientific tests what is possible. Chronically sick people have been waiting for this for a long time.... The argument that it is immoral to destroy embryonic life to rescue human life is inconsistent anyway. Opponents of stem cell research have no problem with putting 500,000 embryos on ice and, in fertility hospitals, surplus fetuses are being thrown away."

Tagesspiegel remarks: "It is clear that the American stem cell

research will now make progress.... The whole world will benefit from the fact that the leading science nation is now on board again in own of the most important basic medical research projects. The potential of stem cell research is great."

¶8. Iran

Tagesspiegel argued: "The time of dogmatic purity is over. Neither the United States nor Europe or Israel can afford such an approach any longer. The global economic depression will quickly lead to unexpected security policy challenges. Iran in turn could possibly be able to detonate the bomb in a few months time. But those who, in such precarious situations, stick to their principles and hope for sudden insights are acting in a negligent way. President Obama has realized this. May others follow suit."

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